
Pathway Planning SOP – SAMPLE

Purpose

This document provides a guide to pathway planning for animal shelters.

Responsibilities

- **Population Rounds Team** – Population rounds are the basis for pathway planning (see Population Rounds SOP). Representatives contribute to a holistic perspective on the animal and outcome options in the context of the shelter population.

Definitions

- **Critical Flow-Through Points** – represent care or an action/event that must occur for an animal to advance towards an outcome. Examples: veterinary examinations, vaccinations, behavior assessments, legal holds, and spay/neuter surgery.
- **Pathway Planning** – the process of actively tracking and guiding each animal’s shelter stay from intake to outcome. Each animal should be on the road to an outcome starting at intake – each step should be anticipated, scheduled, and completed on time.
- **Population Management** – an active process of planning, ongoing daily evaluation, and response to changing conditions. Effective population management requires a plan for intentionally managing each animal’s stay that considers the program’s ability to provide care per the Association of Shelter Veterinarians Guidelines for Standards of Care in Animal Shelters, 2nd ed.
- **Population Rounds (PR)** – team rounds that ensure each animal has a planned pathway based on up-to-date observations and information and is not waiting for any critical flow-through points or decisions. (See Population Rounds SOP.)
- **Outcome Criteria** – physical, behavioral, legal, and/or environmental characteristics that determine whether an animal is eligible for a particular pathway or outcome.

Pathway Plan Process

Pathway Designation

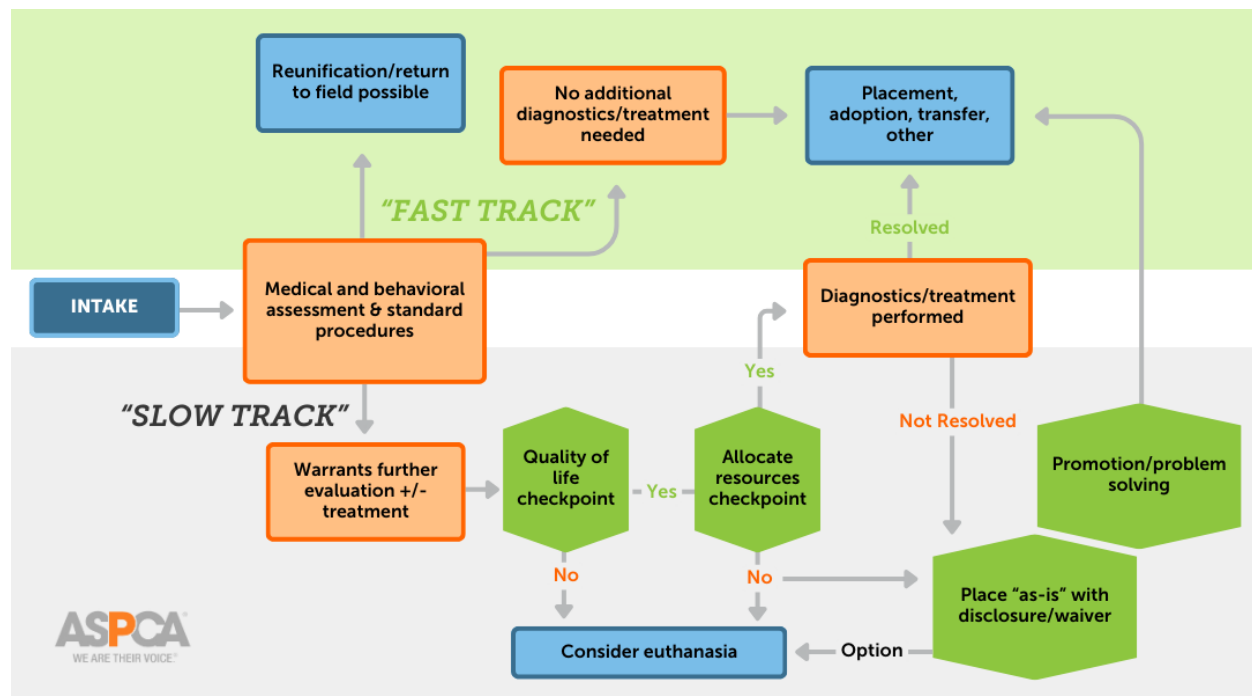
- A pathway is designated for every animal at intake to guide current and future planning.
- A legal or stray hold should not prevent the designation of a pathway, but it may delay certain critical flow-through points until the hold is lifted.
- If the most likely outcome is unclear at intake, the default pathway should be adoption/placement or reunification when appropriate (for stray animals or those better served through services and return to owner).
- Pathway designation is fluid – it can be changed as more information is obtained or as program/case circumstances change.
- The pathway should be recorded (and updated appropriately) in a consistent location, such as the animal’s record or a PR tracking form, so the current pathway is clearly communicated.

Pathway Monitoring

- The animal's pathway should be reviewed as part of PR.
- PR participants should have enough insight and decision-making authority to create and follow up on action plans developed during rounds.

Pathway Plan Flowchart

Critical flow-through points and important considerations in pathway planning for an individual animal.



Foster Care as Part of Pathway Planning for Brick-and-Mortar Shelters

- Foster care is not an outcome but a critical part of pathway planning for some animals.
- Population rounds should include foster animals as part of ongoing pathway planning.
- Animals in foster who are available for placement should continue to be promoted for adoption or transfer.
- Foster placement is most appropriate for:
 - Gaining information (medical or behavioral) on how an individual animal does in a home environment.
 - Animals that need rehabilitation prior to placement if that foster is equipped to provide such support.
 - Slow-track animals with mandatory wait times, such as kittens and puppies under 8 weeks.
 - Neonates and nursing mothers.

- Healthy animals for short periods of time when foster capacity exists, but the shelter is over capacity for in-shelter care. These animals should be carefully selected, marketed, and remain available for outcomes.
- It is not appropriate for:
 - Animals that have medical or behavioral concerns that challenge human safety.
 - Random placement of animals due to shelter crowding and without an outcome plan in place.